

Date: April 12, 2010

Betsy Pringle, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:05. Ms. Pringle suggested that the group begin with a review of what the existing Central Houghton neighborhood plan says about residential land use.

Questions were raised regarding the format of the plan, and whether the discussion of low density residential development will be separate from that of medium and high density development, etc. Staff clarified that the plan format will be different from the current structure, and that discussion at this point does not need to follow either format.

Discussion continued, with members voicing a variety of opinions. One member stated that current densities should be maintained if the area is to remain family-oriented. Another stated that the neighborhood should remain primarily single family, and where other types of development were allowed, the boundaries should be clearly defined.

Ms. Pringle mentioned that the group could consider alternative approaches to allowing infill where larger lots exist, by allowing a smaller house to be built on a second lot. She noted that this approach has been done in other areas in part to preserve existing older homes.

Staff distributed the first of three maps for residential land use. The first map indicated potential subdivision opportunities (shown in light pink). Staff explained that this map indicated where lots could be subdivided and additional housing built, without any changes to existing zoning. Staff noted that the darker pink parcels were those that potentially could be subdivided if the area were rezoned from RS 8.5 (8,500 square feet required for each lot) to RS 7.2 (7,200 square feet required for each lot).

Several members asked questions about the validity of the map, since some parcels that were noted as potentially subdividable were encumbered by streams, slopes, or other environmental features, and in some cases had homes built in the middle of the parcels, which would make subdivision difficult or impossible. Staff noted that the map indicated the greatest amount of potential subdivision, and that an analysis of truly feasible subdivisions had not been done, and would likely be impractical to do.

Discussion continued. Comments included an opinion that the map indicated that if the area zoned RS 8.5 were rezoned to RS 7.2, there would not be a significant change in terms of the percentage of lots that could redevelop.

Staff distributed a second map that indicated parcels (in blue) that would have sufficient lot area to subdivide under the "small lot option" that is currently in place in the Market and Norkirk areas. Staff explained that under the small lot option, one lot would be required to meet the minimum lot size for the zone, while the second lot could be smaller. The size of the house built on the smaller lot would be restricted.

One member inquired about the rationale for adding additional density to Houghton, and whether or not targets were in place that obliged the neighborhood to accommodate additional housing. Staff responded that the residential targets the city strives to meet are on a city-wide basis, and not by neighborhood. Staff noted however, that the targets are substantial, and will likely need to be accommodated in various ways throughout the city.

Discussion returned to the vision for the area, and the opinion by one member that the low density areas should be clearly delineated and maintained as they are. The member added that medium and higher densities should be directed to existing multifamily areas.

Another member referred to the results of the visioning exercise the advisory group participated in (Attachment 3 to memo for 3/30 meeting), and noted that the statement, "Maintain inclusively diverse residential (economically, age, housing type) to promote a full range of lifestyles" had received a high ranking (9 dots).

Responding to questions, staff noted that the small single family lot option would not require rezoning, but rather a change to the subdivision ordinance.

In response to a question regarding the total number of housing units within the Central Houghton neighborhood, staff provided these numbers:

- Total dwelling units: 1,400
- Single family units 1,000
- Multifamily units 400

Discussion on single family residential land use patterns and options continued. Additional comments included:

- The small single family lot option encourages diversity in the housing choices in the neighborhood, and would enable residents to "age in place". The approach is better than a neighborhood-wide rezone to RS 7.2.
- Concern that there is no control over who does the subdividing. Developers could seek these out and redevelop under the small lot size. This could have an impact on character.
- The small single family lot option would be useful where the desire exists to preserve a particular character (historic, older homes, etc.)
- Rezoning the entire neighborhood to RS 7.2 is going too far.
- Support for rezoning neighborhood to RS 7.2 to provide opportunities before infill opportunities are lost and it is too late.
- The rate of change is slow. The "pink" properties have been subdividable forever (zoning has not changed), and they have not developed.
- Small lot concept is unpredictable.
- Leave things the way they are.
- The small lot option is one way to encourage smaller homes (and discourage "mega" homes)
- Perhaps a line should be drawn somewhere in the northern portion of the neighborhood in areas closer to the Houghton Market, where RS 7.2 zoning could be allowed, or the small lot option could be limited to a defined area.

One member suggested that a vote be taken to see what options members supported. Ms. Pringle took a vote which resulted in the following results:

Leave the zoning as it is:	0
Maintain 8.5 zoning, and add the small lot single family option throughout the neighborhood:	5
Rezone all RS 8.5 areas to RS 7.2:	2
Abstain:	2

The conversation next moved to the topic of multifamily land use. Using the land use map, staff pointed out the existing areas where multifamily residential uses are permitted. It was shown that multifamily housing is allowed only within the northernmost area of the neighborhood, south of NE 68th.

Staff noted that in these areas, allowed densities range from 9 units per acre to 12 units per acre. Within the Houghton shopping center area along NE 68th Street, multifamily residential use is also allowed, and there is no maximum density within this zone (BC).

A question was raised regarding residential density at the Juanita Village development. *Staff responded that they would provide that information at the next meeting.*

Staff introduced a third map, which indicated development that had occurred at densities greater than what would be allowed under current zoning.

Discussion continued on issues related to multifamily residential use. Comments included:

- Question – would it be possible to give incentives to developers to encourage them to provide desired benefits, such as the provision of common open space, in the multifamily areas south of NE 68th Street?
- Staff responded that it could be possible to provide incentives such as increased density or increased building height. The desired benefits would need to be defined. For example, if open space were desired, developers would likely need to be required to aggregate parcels to make shared open space feasible. Piecemeal ownerships and existing development make coordinated development with open space in this area challenging.
- A member expressed concern about properties that have densities below that allowed under current zoning. She wondered if a minimum density requirement could be imposed so that potential residential capacity is not lost.
- Staff stated that this could be possible, but also that the smaller homes that have been built in these areas may actually be at 12 units per acre, but simply in a different building form (single family homes on 3,600 square foot lots, rather than apartments at 12 units/acre).
- *Staff was asked to provide actual densities for parcels shown on the third map.*

Staff asked the group for comments on the concept of encouraging existing densities to remain, even when they are greater than current zoning. Staff noted that this concept is one way that a city can preserve more affordable housing, since these developments tend to be older, and often provide a stock of relatively affordable housing (in comparison to newer, larger units).

Members were generally supportive of this concept. One member suggested that if some redevelopment were to be allowed in these projects, that restrictions on affordability be considered. For example, the same number of units would be allowed but some percentage might need to be made affordable.

One member expressed concerns about some of the multifamily developments along NE 68th Street, where the sole access is to this street. She noted that the greater number of units on these parcels results in more vehicles using this access which can be unsafe.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.